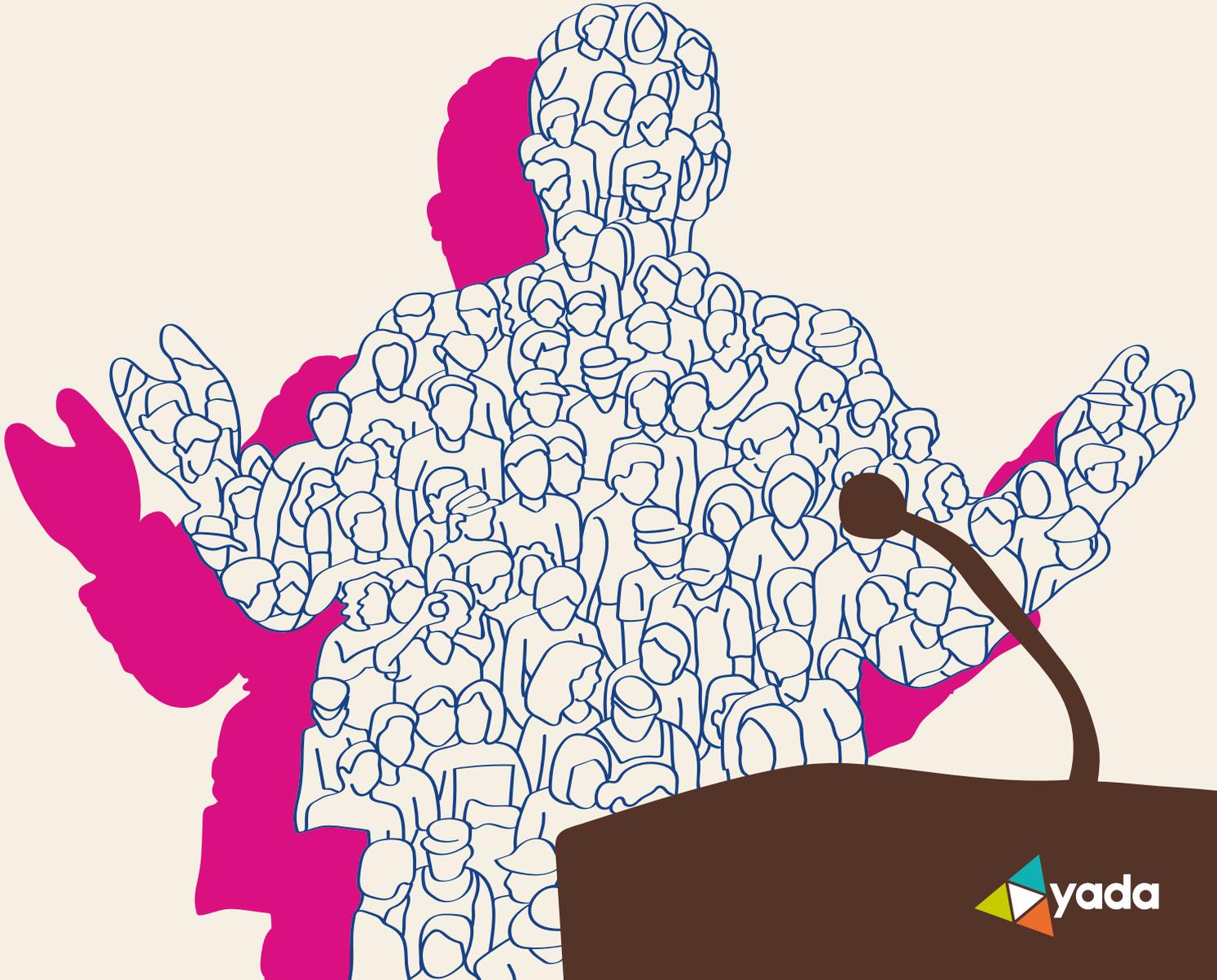


# RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF CIVIL SOCIETY WITH POLITICS AND DECISION MECHANISMS

How can the relationship between  
Civil Society and Politics in Türkiye  
be effective?







# RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF CIVIL SOCIETY WITH POLITICS AND DECISION MECHANISMS

## AUGUST 2022

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# 1

## FOREWORD



# Foreword

**While continuing our efforts to increase the dialogue between civil society and other stakeholders and in this context, the impact of civil society, we started to think about the issue of access to decisions, which is increasingly needed by civil society, with the effect of changing decision mechanisms in Türkiye. Although the decision mechanisms have changed and become increasingly closed to civil society, we believe that civil society can resort to new ways to influence the decisions of different actors. We believe that civil society can contribute to policy decisions, discourses and action plans, thus taking a role in solving social, environmental and economic problems.**

Ever since our establishment as YADA Foundation, we have been carrying out a series of activities in order to enable civil society in Türkiye to be more effective on decisions and opinions. We consider civil society together with the contributing informal structures such as civic initiatives, platforms, and enterprises that have an impact on decisions and opinions, without limiting them only to organizations with legal entities. Accordingly, we design research on social and environmental issues and aim that the information we produce will form the basis for effective implementations and policies. We carry out programs and projects that can meet the needs of civil society with the information we produce on issues such as the needs, reputation, and participation of civil society in Türkiye. By focusing on civil society, we explore the dynamics of decision-making mechanisms such as public administration, politics, and the private sector, and develop various models for the effective participation of civil society in decisions.

Based on the outputs of our “Perceptions and Approaches to Civil Society Organizations”<sup>1</sup> and “Civil Society Organizations based on the Data”<sup>2</sup> research we conducted between 2014-2016, we developed suggestions on how to increase the impact of civil society. In

these studies, we revealed that both public administrators and citizens believe that the participation of civil society organizations in decision-making mechanisms is a prerequisite for democracy. We also observed that citizens and CSO representatives emphasized the lack of communication, dialogue, and cooperation among CSOs. Since the political and social polarization in Türkiye is largely reflected in civil society interactions, CSOs perceive each other as more position-oriented rather than issue-oriented. This perception results in preventing CSOs from different identities and backgrounds from gathering, establishing a democratic dialogue, and thus they become ineffective. In line with the outputs of our research, we have developed a series of models and organized dialogue events to create an effective dialogue and negotiation environment, based on our determination that the civil society has a weak dialogue both within itself and with other stakeholders. In these studies, we applied the “issue-based dialogue” model and with this model, we started to create spaces where CSOs could discuss Türkiye’s priority issues by focusing on their issues, without discussing their existence and ontology. With the Meydan (Square)<sup>3</sup> meetings we have developed to overcome as the civil society in Türkiye the isolation problem that was brought

1 <https://yada.org.tr/yayinlar/sivil-toplum-kuruluslarina-yonelik-almi-ve-yaklasimlar/>

2 <https://yada.org.tr/yayinlar/verilerle-sivil-toplum-kuruluslari/>

3 <https://yada.org.tr/en/meydan/>

about as a reflection of polarization, we continue to create democratic negotiation spaces that will enable civil society in Türkiye to confront its contribution to polarization, where one can talk without claiming more than the other and without trying to assimilate the other.

In the “Dialogue Mapping”<sup>4</sup> research we conducted in 2020, we conducted in-depth interviews with civil society organizations operating in different fields and focused on the barriers preventing or enabling the dialogue by analyzing how CSOs perceive other CSOs, how and by what aspect they categorize other civil actors working in their field, and the classifications they most commonly use when describing the civic space. In the same way, we examined the proximity of civil society to other stakeholders by examining the relations and contacts of CSOs with the public administrations, political parties and the private sector. This research showed us that although there are still certain dichotomies in the forms of dialogue and relationship, civil society is more open to engage in a dialogue with its differences compared to the past. However, when we look at the civil society’s dialogue with the public administrations, the private sector and political parties, we saw that it was rather uncommon for CSO representatives to directly associate other CSOs in their field with political parties at a discursive level. Rather, it is possible to say that an evaluation was made on the basis of “being close to the government”, “working like a GONGO”, “being a partisan”. Although this partisanship is mostly associated with being close to the government, it is seen that a similar discourse is also associated with closeness to the private sector and funding institutions. While dialogue with political parties is generally welcomed by CSOs, cooperation is considered negatively. Two basic practices are observed in the dialogue with political parties. First; activities directly targeting political parties. For example, a women’s organization that works to increase women’s representation in politics is in direct contact with political parties and

describes this communication as an activity that fits its founding purpose. The second practice is staying in dialogue to put the organization’s own practice on the political agenda. Advocacy organizations can engage more in dialogue with political parties in order to influence policy-making processes on specific issues.

While continuing our efforts to increase the dialogue between civil society and other stakeholders and in this context, the impact of civil society, we started to think about the issue of access to decisions, which is increasingly needed by civil society, with the effect of changing decision mechanisms in Türkiye. Although the decision mechanisms have changed and become increasingly closed to civil society, we believe that civil society can resort to new ways to influence the decisions of different actors. We believe that civil society can contribute to policy decisions, discourses and action plans, thus taking a role in solving social, environmental and economic problems. With these in mind, we conducted this research to examine the current status of dialogue, relations and cooperation between civil society and politics, to identify gaps and needs in this field, and to contribute to the construction of a more effective civil society-politics relationship. Considering the outputs of our research “The Relationship of Civil Society With Politics and Decision Mechanisms”, we, as YADA Foundation, will continue to contribute to civil society in Türkiye in order to enable civil society to become a structure that can influence policy decisions and thus citizens’ opinions.

**YADA Foundation**

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4 <https://yada.org.tr/en/yayinlar/dialogue-mapping-of-civil-society-in-turkey/>

# 2

## RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE



# Research Method and Sample

**We developed a methodology in which quantitative and qualitative tools were used together in our research to examine the current status of dialogue, relations, and cooperation between civil society and politics in Türkiye, and to identify gaps and needs in this field.**

We developed a methodology in which quantitative and qualitative tools were used together in our research to examine the current status of dialogue, relations, and cooperation between civil society and politics in Türkiye, and to identify gaps and needs in this field. We conducted the research in three phases: Desk Study, In-depth Interviews, and Online Survey. With the desk study, we reviewed the reports and studies examining the relations between civil society and politics in Türkiye. We have seen that there are very limited studies and a significant gap on the topic.

In the other qualitative phase of our research, we conducted a total of 50 face-to-face and online in-depth interviews with representatives of civil society, politicians (parliament members, mayors, ministry representatives), opinion leaders from academia and the media. We obtained the main findings and detections of our report as a result of these interviews.

In the quantitative phase of our research, we conducted an online survey with the participation of 89 civil society organizations. We anonymously included the outputs we obtained from the survey study, which we conducted without the name of the institution, into the analysis. In the sample distribution of the respondents, 71.4% of the participating institutions operate as associations and 41.2% operate in the Marmara Region. The results of this phase of our research are not representative of Türkiye, and our detections based on our data and findings match the face-to-face interviews.

**We categorized the activity fields of the participants in the quantitative research as follows:**

- ▶ Women and LGBTI+ studies = Gender  
**(14%)**
- ▶ Environment and Agriculture = Environment/Ecology  
**(11%)**
- ▶ Children and Youth  
**(15%)**
- ▶ Education  
**(19%)**
- ▶ Aging/Elderly population  
**(5%)**
- ▶ Civil society empowerment and Development = Other  
**(12%)**
- ▶ Democracy, Animal Rights, Human Rights, Refugees and Disabled = Advocacy  
**(11%)**
- ▶ Culture, Art and Sports  
**(7%)**
- ▶ Humanitarian Aid/Solidarity and Citizen  
**(7%)**

# 3

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN TÜRKİYE: WHAT DOES THIS RESEARCH TELL US?**



# The Relationship Between Civil Society And Politics In Türkiye: What Does This Research Tell Us

In the qualitative phase of the research, interviews with civil society, political parties, public administration, academia, and opinion leaders are included. In the interviews, the current situation in civil society-politics relations, problems and solution proposals were focused in general.

## ON CIVIL SOCIETY-POLITICS RELATIONSHIP

In the qualitative phase of the research, interviews with civil society, political parties, public administration, academia, and opinion leaders are included. In the interviews, the current situation in civil society-politics relations, problems and solution proposals were focused in general. Despite the fact that civil society organizations operate in all geographical regions of Türkiye, questions are raised about how much civil society knows about politics, how much politics is fed by civil society, and how open it is to evaluations from civil society. As YADA Foundation, in our research to answers these questions, we evaluated a variety of topics such as democratization, the current situation in terms of participation and inclusivity, and the establishment of a favorable environment for civil society to carry out its activities freely and how it can increase its impact.

### Politics, like the civic space, has shrunk

Participants from different perspectives express that the civic space has shrunk at this point and it is getting harder to work in the field. This shrinking of space is not only happening to civil society, but also in politics, es-

pecially to opposition parties. Political parties also have problems like CSOs in terms of freedom of expression and organization, and in many cities cannot go out to the streets. They are surrounded by lawsuits or targeting. In other words, research focusing on the civil society-politics dialogue and the impact of civil society on decision mechanisms reveals that polarization and contraction are experienced not only in the civic space but also in the field of politics. While the importance of overcoming ideological barriers and concerns regarding the relationship and dialogue was frequently emphasized in the interviews, it is observed that the situation is not experienced as such in practice, and therefore, the capacity for influence is not strong.

### Polarization among politics, public administration and civil society prevents dialogue

Reactions from both sides to the visit of a representative of a civil society organization working in the field of humanitarian aid to the head of youth branches of one of the opposition parties when the qualitative phase of the research was carried out was strikingly revealing how

polarization in Türkiye has transformed the ground and made dialogue difficult. In addition to the problems arising from the political environment, there are problems arising from mutual prejudice, distrust, polarization and lack of communication, which affect the influential capacity of civil society. In general, although both sides talk about openness, inclusiveness and pluralism, it is seen that this is not the case in practice, that political parties communicate more with CSOs closer to them and CSOs also act in this way politically.

### **Field expertise from civil society expected to be transferred to politics through a comprehensible language**

While independence and criticism are underlined in the context of influence on politics, the importance of specializing in the civic space and conveying field knowledge with scientific data and in an understandable way is emphasized in the context of power of influence. Representatives of both civil society and politics state that civil society's ties to the field are stronger yet it relates weakly to the reality in terms of existing solutions, thus has trouble influencing politics.

### **Transparent relations with an independent civil society should be maintained**

A shift between the situation in past years and today is a general acceptance of the advocacy activities of CSOs covering political institutions and policy processes. In other words, advocacy activities are no longer referred as "politicizing", but are seen as a necessity for solving social problems. However, concepts such as "distancing" and "independence", "criticism" and "objectivity" are frequently emphasized in terms of ethical codes in the relationship and effect in this context. The involvement of CSOs in these processes without overshadowing their independence and the emphasis on the transparency of relations are reflected in the evaluations in the interviews.

### **Civil society also needs to become financially independent**

Financial independence is frequently emphasized among the current problems of civil society. For this, tax reductions, the issue of public interest, and the establishment of an egalitarian system in which public funds can be distributed equally are stated as possible and feasible solutions.

### **Türkiye's administrative system should be transformed into an inclusive and pluralistic structure**

It is stated that in Türkiye's experience of civil society-politics relations, the tendency of opposition parties to look more favorably towards dialogue with CSOs is experienced in the same way today, and that the opposition parties are in a more pluralistic and inclusive dialogue trend, while the government is increasingly standardizing the CSOs it meets. Despite all the shrinking space and the inclusiveness of the public, the importance of CSOs' activity in the legislative processes is emphasized for both sides.

Another highlighted issue is that for democratization, for a system truly open to participation, a free environment, the necessity of a perspective rooted in human rights, that is, the systems alone are not enough to provide participation, inclusivity and pluralism. It seems that the system discussions will be effective if they can move from an existing solution to a consensus and a model of coexistence that will spread to the society.

# 4

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN TÜRKİYE



# The Relationship Between Civil Society And Politics In Türkiye

Although civil society organizations have always had difficulties in cooperating with the state in the history of Türkiye, the recent events show us that it has become even harder for civil society organizations, the government and decision makers to meet on a common ground. According to the results of the Dialogue Monitoring Research<sup>5</sup> conducted by YADA Foundation in 2020, it is stated that after the Presidential System Constitutional Amendment, the access of civil society organizations to decision-makers has been limited, and that dialogue and cooperation remain at merely the discursive level. Where politics position civil society is becoming increasingly vague, or it cannot go beyond the definition of “voluntary work”. Sharing information and experience with civil society organizations is kept at a limited level, and the hierarchical structuring is increasing, contrary to the equal relationship desired by civil society organizations. In this case, civil society organizations that are valued by society generally lead to low-intensity impact with unsystematic collaborations.

Such that, with the Decree-Laws that were issued in the State of Emergency in the recent past, civil society organizations have been closed down, their founders have been put on trial, some are sentenced to prison, and some are still being prosecuted.<sup>6</sup> As the civic space, media and freedom of expression are restricted, new agendas emerge for civil society. Civil society is trying to produce policies for Türkiye's issues, looking for different ways to make its voice heard. In the absence of a participatory democracy environment, people need civil society more than ever. At this point, civil society organizations start to include people from different segments of society, approach them holistically with a certain awareness, and expand their working areas. Although they have inadequacies in covering segments different from their own, they continue to work.

In fact, the necessary situation for politics and civil society can be defined as seeing civil society as a part of the political process, establishing equal structures rather than hierarchical structures and creating a transparent process.<sup>7</sup>

5 <https://yada.org.tr/en/yayinlar/dialogue-monitoring-research/>

6 <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/A-Defenseless-Defense.pdf>

7 <https://www.sivilsayfalar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/rapor-Siyaset-ve-Sivil-Toplum-Turkce.pdf>



**Although civil society organizations have always had difficulties in cooperating with the state in the history of Türkiye, the recent events show us that it has become even harder for civil society organizations, the government and decision makers to meet on a common ground.**

# Civil Society's Perception of the Politics

## Politics and civil society are not familiar with each other well enough

While defining civil society and its function, political actors tend to make an assessment through the institutions or visible structures they have interacted with so far. The interviews also show that political actors do not know civil society enough. Considering the reasons for not knowing each other enough here, it can be said that both civil society and politics create legitimate grounds and discourses according to their own dynamics. Politics tends to see civil society only as the demanding party. This causes politicians to distance themselves from civil society. On the other hand, it is seen that the civil society structures with which political actors communicate most are fellow citizens' associations, professional chambers and unions. Therefore, they either establish a kind of dialogue they establish with the voters, or they establish it by coming together in certain conflict areas. When civil society organizations come into contact with politicians, they refrain from appearing engaged in politics and try to establish an equal dialogue with all parties. The fact that CSOs cannot always communicate with all political parties also prevents civil society to know the politics better and make an influence on policy decisions.

## The civil society structure in Türkiye has been swept away by political phenomena

All political actors agree that civil society is very important in the development of a country and the establishment of democracy. It is thought that CSOs create a background for effective work by pressuring certain points. However, it is stated that the effectiveness of a CSO in decisions from past to present in Türkiye de-



While defining civil society and its function, political actors tend to make an assessment through the institutions or visible structures they have interacted with so far.

pends on who it represents and how close it is to the state. Politicians expressing this view state that the political conjuncture in Türkiye is directing and even changing civil society organizations, and accordingly that civil society has a structure that has been swept away by different political phenomenon and is not properly grounded. It is thought that people in Türkiye are already striving to be close to the power, they are in the culture of taking advantage of the opportunities of the power to be protected, this works in the same way in civil society and is a dimension of the weakness of civil society.

## Civil society turns into a tool to legitimize those holding political power

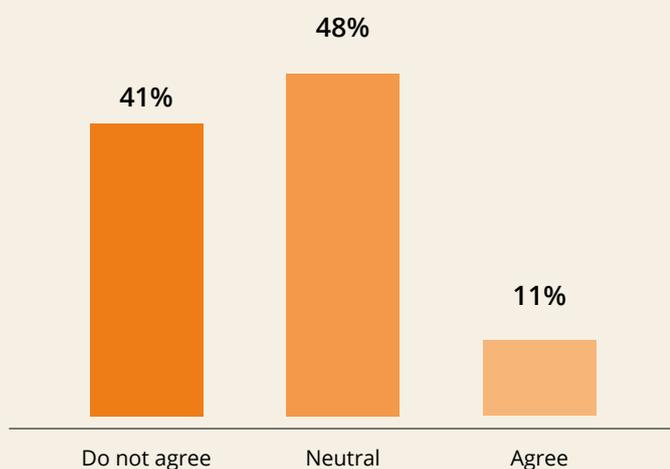
Some of the political actors define civil society as a structure that sees what the public institution cannot see in areas such as the needs of the people, humanitarian aid and legal aid. In this respect, it is thought that one of the important functions of civil society is to contribute to the process of supervision and regulation of the public. This is where the issue of the independence of civil society is highlighted. The emphasis is on the necessity of civil society to act as a civil body while doing these things, not to benefit from the opportunities of the public, that

is, not to have any connection with those who hold the public administration power. Political actors, who define civil society in this direction, think that the biggest problem in civil society today is that some civil society organizations have fallen into the hands of some small groups and turned into semi-public institutions, losing the freedom of civil society by taking great opportunities from the public. In other words, politicians of this view express that a small group holding Turkish civil society today survives with public means and has turned into a tool to legitimize political power. It is thought that people and structures that hold political power in Türkiye can thus be involved in this kind of civil society structure and control civil society.

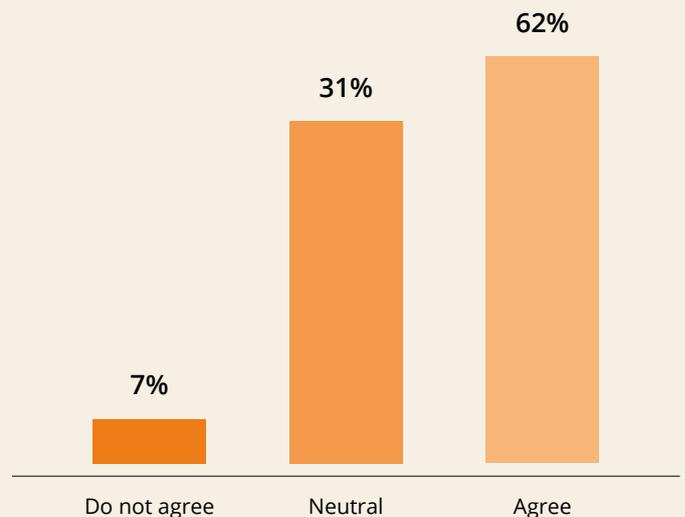
### The impact of politics on civil society is greater

When talking about the influence of civil society on politics, politics is considered to be more influential on civil society. This conclusion, which stands out in the qualitative interviews, can also be seen in the evaluations of the CSOs participating in the survey on the capacity of civil society to influence politics. 41% of the CSOs surveyed think that civil society does not have the capacity to influence politics.

**Graph 1. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Civil society has the capacity to influence political parties"**



**Graph 2. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Civil society should influence political parties"**



However, 62% of the CSOs surveyed think that civil society should influence political parties. In other words, the common view is that civil society should influence political parties. This view, shared by the civil society, is in a position to provide an advantage in terms of possible collaborations and the recognition of civil society by political parties.

When describing civil society, both parliamentarian and political party administrators are actually talking about the structures formed by the groups they consider voters. For example, fellow citizens' associations are among the institutions that politicians have the most contact with in the context of civil society. It is stated that fellow citizens' associations stay in contact with politicians with the agenda of acquiring a career in politics, rather than bringing local problems to the politics. Politicians, too, see the target groups of fellow citizens' associations as voters and establish their relations with civil society in this frame. In this case, it is possible to say that politics has an effect on civil structures such as fellow citizens' associations and professional chambers.

However, it is stated that the lack of financial models in civil society and the uncertainties in civil society legisla-

tion cause civil society to engage in politics. It is thought that this causes the civil society field to become organizations that only work for its own neighborhood, rather than a civil society that embraces everyone or shares everyone's problems. It is stated that the changing political conditions also affect the values of civil society. Thus, it is stated that civil society has turned into a sub-organ of politics, and this does not serve the purpose of civil society. It seems that the field of civil society has also been hit by such fluctuations created by short or long-term politics, because each time, all values of CSOs have to be redefined from scratch.

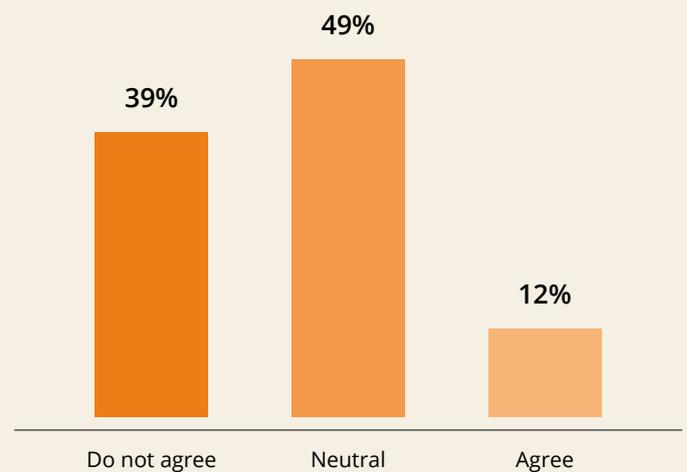
### The polarization among civil society itself is also increasing

Between 2014 and 2015, it is thought that there was a ground where different segments of civil society talked to each other, and that the constitutional processes at the time had an important facilitating effect on this situation. It is stated that there was an effective dialogue ground in these years, but then the polarization among civil society organizations increased. The referendum period is defined as a successful period in which civil society could pressure politics. The disappearance of the dialogue grounds and networks established at that time is defined as an indicator of the disappearance of the function of civil society over time. It is thought that civil society suffered a great loss after this period. Particular attention is drawn to the ability of civil society to bring differences the opposites together. It is emphasized that it is important to rebuild a civil society that can freely convey its ideas to politics or state authorities and convey the views of differences to decision makers.

While CSO representatives define civil society, they argue that it is one of the most important autonomous mechanisms of a society that different segments and different identities meet in the civic space and produce common values. There is a prevailing view that this function can only exist in a democratic society. In the

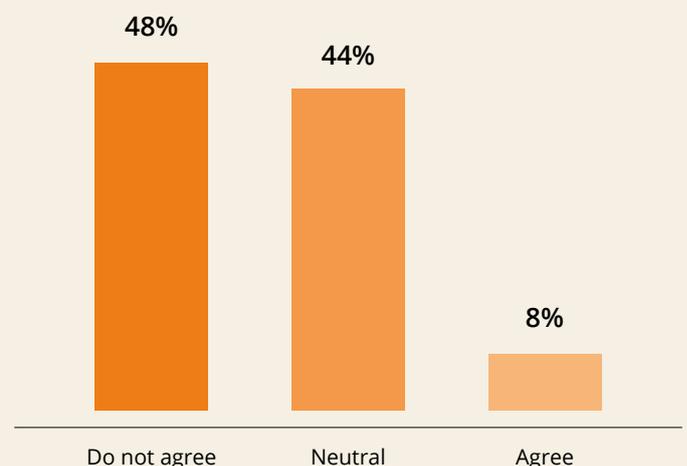
situation in Türkiye, it is thought that the dominance of politics prevents the formation of these mechanisms. Although increasing polarization is not brought into the agenda in ordinary times, it is more evident in times when politics is marginalized. Those who think that civil society is polarized within itself also state that civil society activities are politicized.

Graph 3. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Civil society has a strong dialogue among itself"



A similar picture emerges when the CSOs participating in the survey evaluate the dialogue and relationship within civil society. Accordingly, 39% of the CSOs state that the civil society dialogue among itself is not strong, while 48% think that the relations are not strong either.

Graph 4. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Civil society has a strong relationship among itself"



## **Civil society has become more fragile in fundraising**

Civil society is always thought to be fragile in creating its own resources, and that this fragility is increasing. Some of the CSOs, which have become more fragile in fundraising, are also criticized for their easy access to state resources. It is underlined that such CSOs have a more hierarchical structure and they transfer their resources to their personal lives rather than their activities. However, it is thought that the organizations that cannot create their own resources are not able to fulfill their functions while trying to get project grants. In other words, it is stated that civil society in general consists of structures that can maintain themselves only in the presence of a project. On the other hand, it is accepted that there is an effective human resource capital in civil society.

In parallel, civil society organizations express that the financial sustainability of CSOs is very important for both managers and institutions themselves. It is frequently mentioned that one of the biggest problems in Türkiye at the moment is the financial sustainability of civil society. Inadequate financial resources seem to be one of the major obstacles to the effective functioning of civil society.

## **CSOs need government incentives to work more effectively**

The difficulties experienced by civil society regarding financial sustainability are expressed by all stakeholders. It is stated that in addition to the ability of CSOs to create their own resources, government incentives for civil society are also needed. It is also underlined that government incentives should be based on extremely rational principles. All agree on the need for the state to financially support civil society on equal terms and in a fair manner. Regardless of what an organization advocates, it is stated that CSOs can sustain themselves if they can be supported regardless of their subject. It is

also emphasized that such incentives must be audited by an independent supervisory board.

CSOs have a tendency to employment on a voluntary basis with the effect of financial difficulties. It is shared that the lack of professional employees reduces the influence of civil society. As well as employment incentives for CSOs, applications such as tax exemptions, insurance premium supports or tax reductions are among the suggestions shared for CSOs to be financially sustainable.

## **Civil society itself criticizes the introversion of CSOs**

Some politicians state that civil society has an introverted structure. This situation is among the criticisms directed at civil society by the CSOs themselves. It is stated that one of the biggest problems of civil society for a long time has been that it remains closed, like the academy, and remains in echo chambers. It is stated that civil society is accomplishing meaningful work, but not publicized enough. It is underlined that the inability of civil society to expand its activities is an important problem. Although the general opinion is that there is no freedom of the press in Türkiye, it is stated that there are channels through which civil society can announce and disseminate their own work. There is a prevailing view that CSOs need to use these channels effectively, including social media.

## **Civil society, like politics, is a men's world and competes among each other**

There are also those who think that civil society, like politics, is a men's world and competes among each other. This interpretation actually stems from the fact that civil society actors who interact with politics are mostly men. On the other hand, it is seen that some civil society leaders, like politicians, have the characteristics of staying in a certain position and not relin-

quishing the leadership of their institution. From this point of view, it is thought that the world of men which constitutes the competition in politics, also has reflections in civil society. This keeps civil society away from a pluralistic and egalitarian structure.

Accordingly, one of the biggest obstacles to the distancing of civil society organizations from each other is thought to be the managers of CSOs. It is thought that CSO managers aim to bring themselves to the forefront rather than the issues they are working on, that success is more important to people, and this has very negative effects on civil society's coming together and acting together.

# Politics' Perception of the Civil Society

## Politics no longer create a social movement

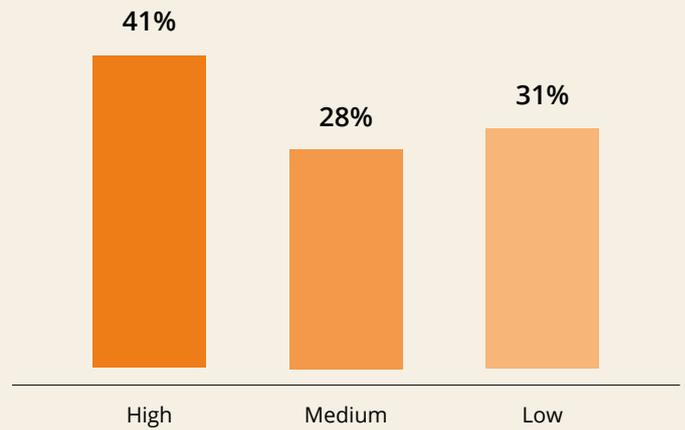
Civil society representatives and opinion leaders define politics as a tool to ensure dialogue among citizens. It is thought that politics should ideally be a tool that prioritizes people, establishes the connection between people, enables them to live in harmony with each other in the public sphere, to live in reconciliation, to live in prosperity, and to protect certain democratic ideals and rights. In other words, ideal politics is defined as all the tools that people need in order to solve certain problems, carry out their daily lives and live humanely as of the moment they live together. Today, it is stated that there is no such political structure in Türkiye, and each party is a replica of the other, considering the way of doing politics. In this context, in qualitative face-to-face meetings, it is criticized that politics in Türkiye no longer produces anything and cannot create a social movement.

However, according to the results of the online survey in which CSOs evaluated the effects of the ruling and opposition parties in Türkiye, the participants state that the social impact capacity of the ruling party is high and the influence of the opposition parties is low. While 41% of the respondents think that the influence of the ruling parties is high, only 8% say that the social influence of the opposition parties is high.

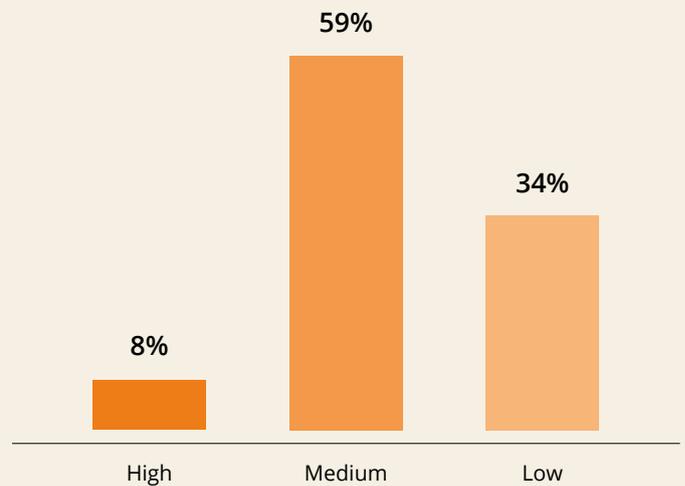
## Although there are developments in politics in Türkiye, there is a consensus that political channels are blocked

It is thought that politics has been built on identities since the establishment of the republic, and this has always intensified the climate of polarization in the country. Therefore, this identity politics creates a political

Graph 5. Evaluation of the social impact capacity of the ruling party/alliance by CSOs



Graph 6. Evaluation of the social impact capacity of opposition parties by CSOs



environment that is divided into identities. This makes realistic politics impossible or difficult. It is stated that since politics in Türkiye is carried out through identities, this identity politics brings with it the problem of justice. However, while evaluating political actors, some civil society representatives think that a positive distance has started to form between the language some

party leaders used to use and the current language they adopted. It is stated that the conservative ones of the new political parties are trying to restructure them with more libertarian values. However, at this point, it is criticized that the main political equation is people-centered and populism-centered.

The majority agree that political channels are blocked in Türkiye and even in the world. It is also thought that civil society, intellectuals and opinion leaders can play a role in overcoming this blockage. In this direction, it is recommended to work on eliminating the hopelessness of citizens first.

### **Ideal politics: it is the bridge between the state, civil society, the private sector, and the public**

There are some definitions put forward by representatives of civil society on what would ideal politics look like. When defining politics, it is seen that an ideal state is defined first. Ideally, it is emphasized that the state should be a structure consisting of civil society, private sector and the public. Politics, on the other hand, is defined as the mechanism that should be in order for the relationship between all these stakeholders to run in a healthy way. In other words, ideal politics is seen as a structure that protects the rights of all kinds of institutions, the public and the private sector, and ensures the independence of civil society. At this point, one of the biggest problems of current politics in Türkiye is described as the ideological shaping of politics revolving around the changing governments.

### **Civil society criticizes the lack of representation of youth and women in politics**

It is underlined that politics in Türkiye is blocked in many different ways. Civil society often criticizes the lack of visibility, representation and participation of women and youth in politics. It is stated that a limited and controlled space is provided to the young people



**It is thought that politics has been built on identities since the establishment of the republic, and this has always intensified the climate of polarization in the country.**

or women participating in the political parties. It is stated that the party leaders do not give a transformative role to the young and women, but only include those who think like them to the parties. It is emphasized that the current political positions in Türkiye carry the traditions of the 70s and 80s, do not apply a transformative and progressive understanding of politics, and this is an indication of the blocking of the channels in politics. The polemical language of the current political leaders of the old generation is also criticized in this sense.

### **Politics should cease to be a full-time job**

Especially when compared to Europe, the inability of young professionals with a workforce to be in politics in Türkiye is seen as an obstacle. In this respect, the fact that politics is a full-time job in Türkiye, thus causing it to be coded as the job of the rich and retirees at one point, is among the issues that have been criticized. This is considered to be the reason why politics in Türkiye is carried out on a narrow stage. The fact that politics is financed by the grassroots of political parties is also cited as a reason for political actors to be made up of the wealthy.

# The Current Situation of the Relationship Between Civil Society and Politics



In the relationship between civil society and politics, the biggest problem seems to be the mutual bias. This does not make an effective relationship possible. Since the relations established are based on mutual acquaintance or similar worldview, the world of civil society that politics encounters, creates a perception of civil society that acts in accordance with political interests.

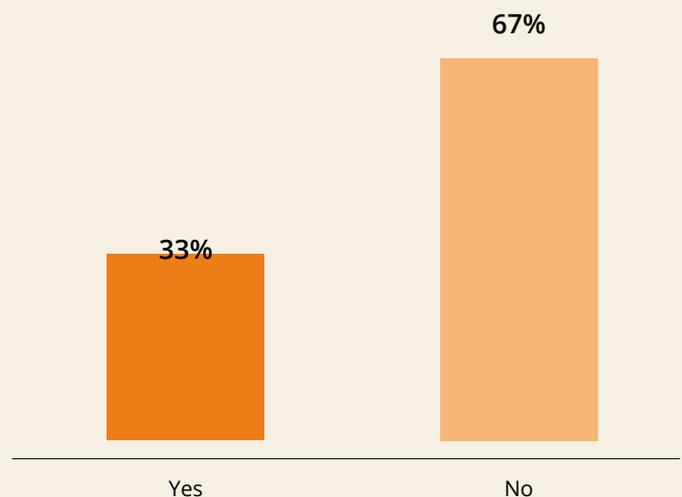
## There is a mutual bias between civil society and politics

In the relationship between civil society and politics, the biggest problem seems to be the mutual bias. This does not make an effective relationship possible. Since the relations established are based on mutual acquaintance or similar worldview, the world of civil society that politics encounters, creates a perception of civil society that acts in accordance with political interests. Stakeholders, who do not see a problem in the convergence of civil society to politics, believe that the convergence of civil society to politics with political arguments creates a mutual bias. Here again, it is emphasized that civil society should reveal its expertise rather than its worldview when communicating with any political party.

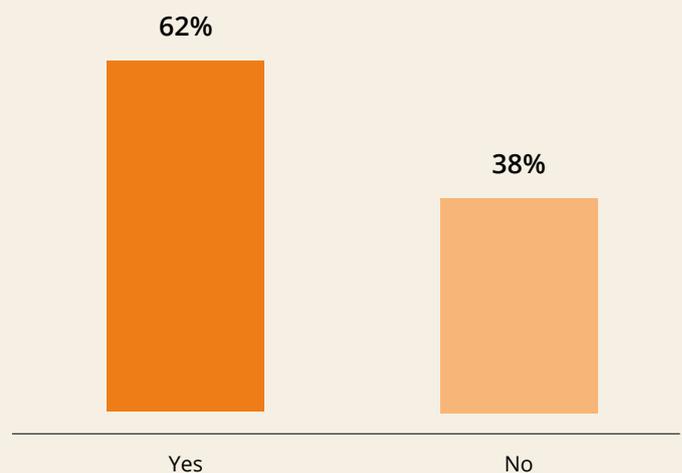
33% of the CSOs participating in the survey state that they work directly or indirectly with political parties. In other words, with a large percentage of 67%, CSOs do not work with political parties.

On the other hand, 62% of CSOs state that they are willing to cooperate with political parties. Therefore, it can be said that civil society is open to cooperation with politics, according to both qualitative face-to-face interviews

Graph 7. The status of CSOs working with political parties directly or indirectly



Graph 8. CSOs' openness to cooperate with political parties



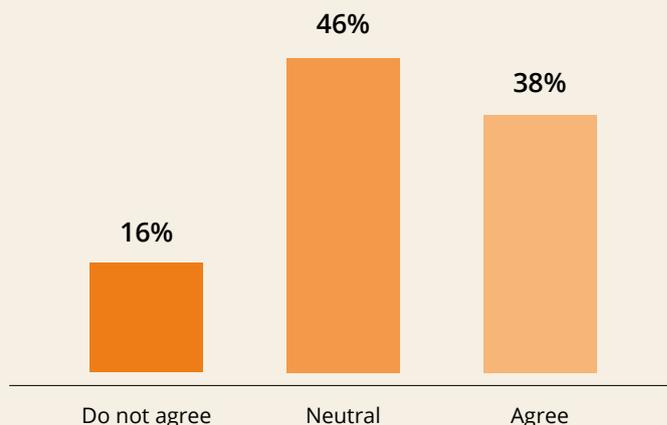
and the results of the survey conducted on civil society. There is an impMediumnt opportunity here and when mutual prejudices are eliminated, an effective communication and relationship may be established between civil society and politics.

### In the ideal relationship between civil society and politics, politics should draw from civil society

It is argued that in a democratic country, ideally, civil society institutions should feed and guide politics and try to solve the main problems of society through political mechanisms. It is crucial here to remember that civil society and politics are inseparable mechanisms. It is also criticized by some politicians that politics should be made in line with the demands of the society, but that politics does not establish an effective relationship with civil society in this sense.

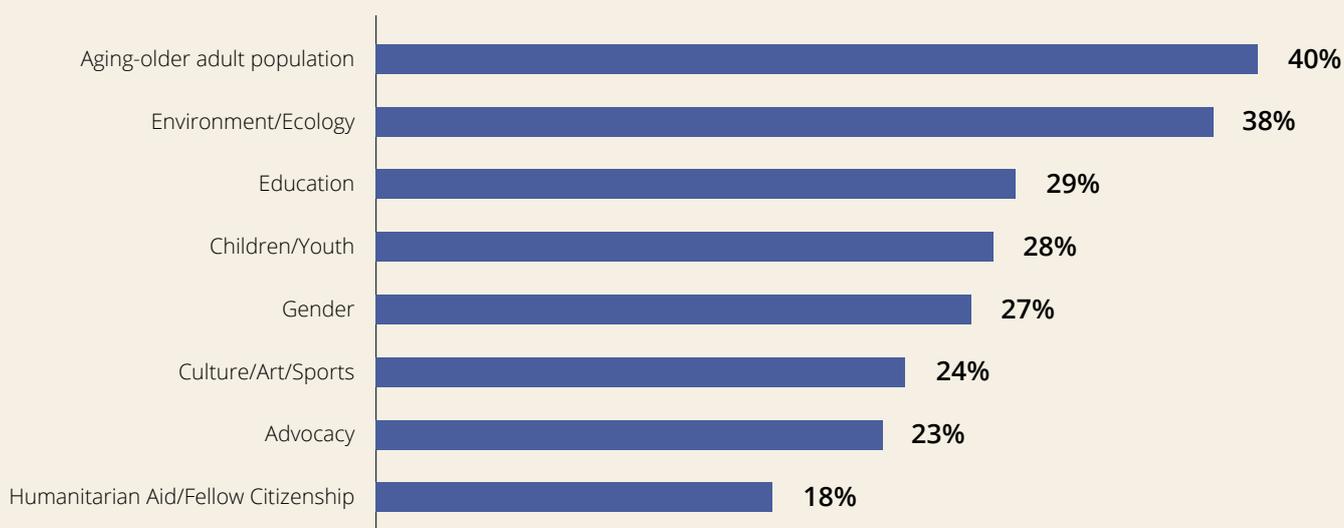
38% of the CSOs participating in the survey think that politics do not draw from civil society. Only 16% of CSOs do not agree with this statement.

**Graph 9. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Politics does not draw from civil society, nor listens to its voice"**



When we look at the rate of agreement with this statement on a thematic basis, it is seen that among the CSOs participating in the survey, the organizations that think that politics do not draw from civil society the most are institutions working in the fields of aging-older adult population and environment-ecology.

**Graph 10. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Politics does not draw from civil society, nor listens to its voice" by thematic category**



However, it is also emphasized that politics should build walls that prevent civil society from being influenced by political views. On the other hand, there is a need for politics to transform into a structure that takes into account the suggestions of civil society and follows a way and method that will ensure social peace and tranquility together with civil society.

**Receiving expert support is the most frequent reason for politics to contact with civil society**

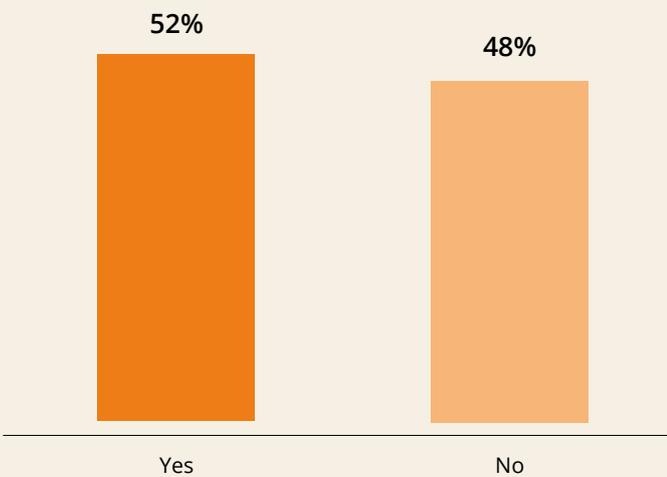
52% of the CSOs participating in the survey state that political parties contact them to get support from their institutions on any issue. It is worth reiterating that this rate is based only on the statements of the CSOs participating in the survey and is not representative of Türkiye.

We also asked the CSO participants, who stated that political parties have contacted them, in which situations political parties contact them the most. Accordingly, politics mostly contact civil society in terms of expertise support (27%), receiving research support (26%) and making a new regulation in the field of civil society (26%).

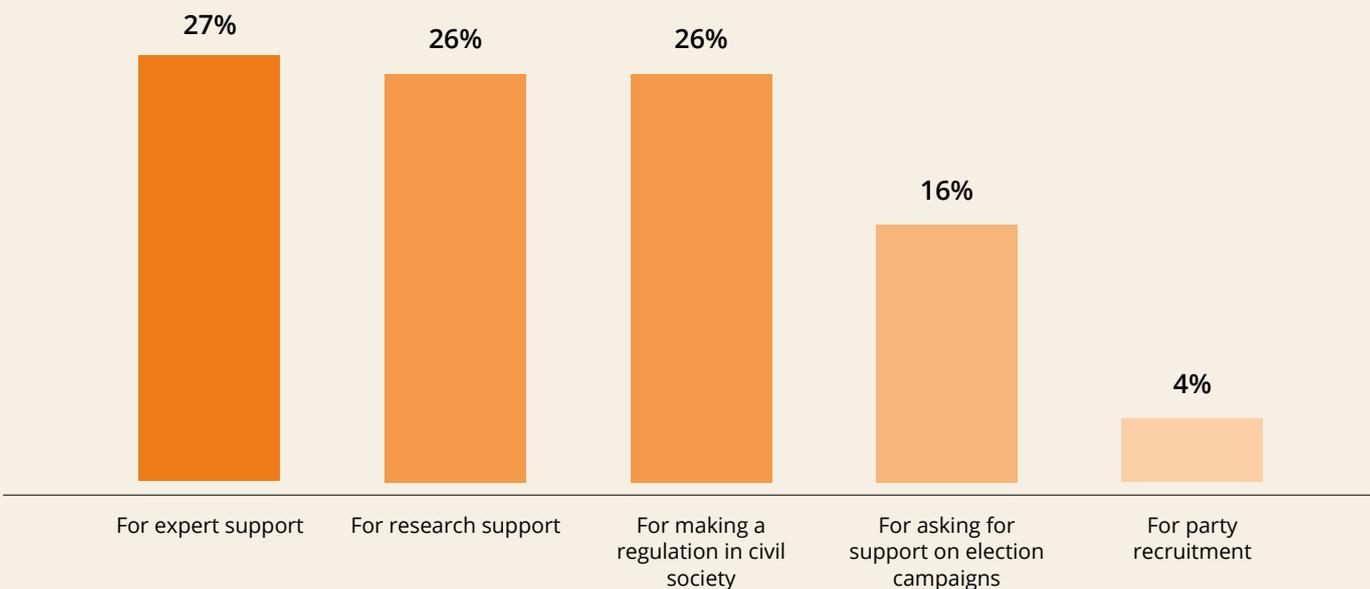
**Some civil society structures stay in touch with politics in line with their political career goals**

Political actors, who think that civil society is a men's world just like politics and compete with each other, state that civil society is not allowed to enter politics in

**Graph 11. The status of political parties to contact their institutions to get support from CSOs on any issue**



**Graph 12 . Rates showing on which issues politics communicate with CSOs**

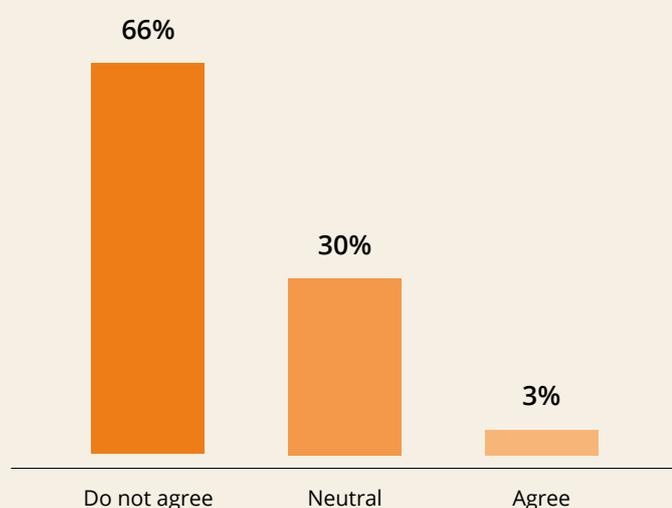


certain areas when they want to engage with civil society. It is seen that the emphasis here is on civil society structures working especially in the field of disability and on Roma citizens. It is stated that when institutions working in these two fields come into contact with politics, their agenda is the political career ladder they aim for. Similarly, it is seen that politicians are in contact with fellow citizens' associations, and institutions and opinion leaders working in this field turn their target groups into voters. Politicians, who think that civil society generally consists of such structures, state that civil society is not distant from politics and even acts as the political parties want. This is cited as one of the reasons why such civil society structures do not benefit the communities they represent.

### There is a need to change the hierarchical relationship style and mentality between civil society and politics

66% of the surveyed CSOs think that political parties are not open to the influence of civil society, except for a mere 3%.

Graph 13. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement "Political parties are open to the influence of civil society"



One of the points on which the interviewed stakeholders agreed is that the hierarchical relationship style and mentality between civil society and politics should be changed. It is criticized that the value of civil society is not sufficiently understood by politicians. In this direction, it is seen that the hierarchical relationship between politics and civil society changes and there is a need for dialogue channels in a more egalitarian structure.

If an egalitarian structure can be formed between these two actors, the opinion is that civil society can also participate effectively in policy-making processes. Stakeholders think that civil society can create a pressure mechanism on politicians by increasing its own power and effectiveness, rather than waiting for a change in the understanding of politicians. Another point that is underlined here is that while doing this, it is not ignored that there are no longer only civil society actors in the civil society field, but that it is a new locality area that includes activists, cooperatives and informal structures.

### Politics knows civil society in a limited way and evaluates its function in this limited frame

When talking about civil society, political party representatives make a definition based on the more local structures they are most commonly in contact with. Rather than producing solutions to local problems with such civil structures, they establish a relationship with the members of the association at a voter level. This shows that the politicians meet on a ground where they receive demands such as permanent employment from civil society. For these reasons, some political actors say that such local associations replace civil society.

It is seen that politicians also criticize themselves while expressing all these. It can be said that some political actors want to hold meetings with opinion leaders to discuss social issues with civil society as well. However, in addition to fellow citizens' associations, CSOs with which politicians establish another dialogue seem to be institu-

tions working in the field of disability. Here again in this relationship type, a demanding civil society is portrayed. The relationship seems to be limited to one point, such as providing battery-powered vehicles to institutions working on disability. When they cannot keep up with such demands, politicians start to distance themselves from civil society. In addition to these relations, it is seen that activities such as making policy together with civil society are very limited.

### Political interests form a hierarchy within civil society

In civil society, it is seen that some institutions working on vulnerable groups share particular interests with political parties holding power. One example is a type of relationship in which political parties that want to win over vulnerable groups as voters establish halls for meetings of such civil society organizations and give them gifts. It is thought that such privileges, especially granted by the ruling parties to some institutions, create a hierarchy within the civil society. It is stated that this causes civil society to lose its core meanings.

### Political relations based on interests neutralize civil society

Civil society's interest relations with public administration and politics render civil society ineffective. It is possible to see the desire of civil society to establish a relationship of interest with politics in several areas. For example, some of the civil society organizations' requests from politics and their requests to find a job for their acquaintances are some of the areas where they come into contact with politics. Such forms of relationship, which are completely disconnected from the civic space, also cause political actors to misidentify civil society and widen the distance between them. At the same time, it is stated that such requests for employment or favor is seen by some as a criterion for success in evaluating the success of politicians.

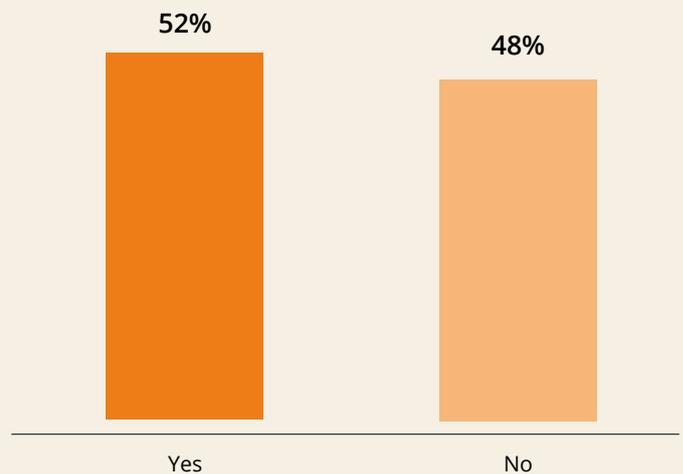
In addition, it is stated that the civil society structures established by some religious sects and communities are based entirely on interests, and these interests are harmful to the civil society. It is stated that such institutions and structures, which are thought to be quite different from the civil society expressed in general terms, are involved in some issues on the agenda and can only affect the administration in this sense.

### There is a need for a regulation on the effective participation of civil society in decision-making

Those who think that civil society has never had an influence or contribution to politics and governments are in the majority. One reason for this is cited as the absence of a law/regulation in this area. For example, it is criticized that there is no legal requirement for civil society organizations to participate in the decisions of local governments, and that there is no regulation in the parliament that will ensure the participation of CSOs working on that issue in the process of making laws.

On the other hand, it is possible to see the areas where CSOs participate in the legislative processes of the parliament. The Animal Rights Act is cited as an example. In the making process of this law, the communication between the parliament members who proposed the law and the

Graph 14. Rates of CSOs working directly or indirectly with central public institutions



chairman of the commission has with the civil society representatives during the commission has been recognized as a successful example. It is stated that there was a very intense civil society participation during the making of this law, so negotiations were held with CSOs even while the draft was being prepared. However, another issue that draws attention here is that the diversity of the CSOs participating in the law processes is not sufficient. Within the civil society, many different ideas can offer different solutions to the same issue. This shows a clear need for an understanding to ensure the consensus of everyone who can take part in the grassroots and a mechanism that can be embraced.

**Table 1. Cases where CSOs are in contact with public institutions**

Acquaintance meetings/Visits	15%
Knowledge sharing	14%
Demanding	11%
Receiving information	10%
Expert activities	8%
Advocacy activities	7%
Project collaborations	7%
Research	6%
Producing strategies	6%
Writing reports	5%
Financial support	4%
Making complaints	4%
Disseminating the campaigns created by the public institutions	3%
Legal processes/legal objection processes	3%

In the questionnaire, we have asked questions aiming to understand if CSOs have contact with central and local public administrations, and to what extent. 52% of the CSOs participating in the survey state that they work directly or indirectly with central public institutions.

When we look at the relationship between CSOs and central public institutions, we see their relations consist of

**Table 2. Cases where CSOs are in contact with the Turkish Grand National Assembly**

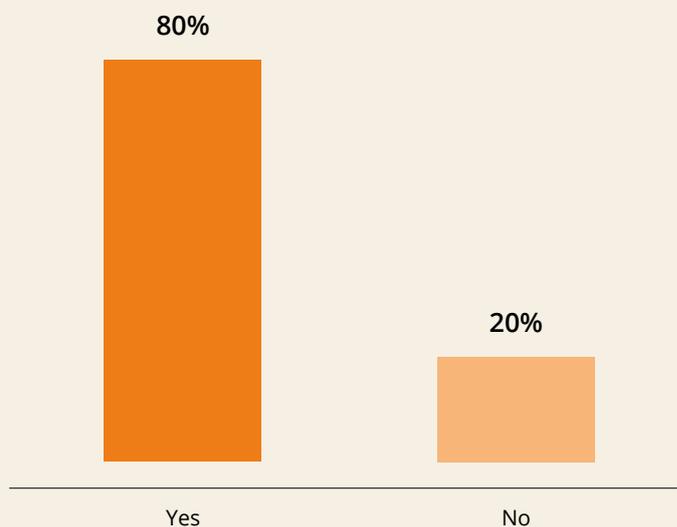
Meeting with parliament members/visits	86%
Participating in Assembly commission meetings	29%
Submitting petitions	21%
Contributing to drafts	21%
Receiving resources from the Assembly	7%

acquaintance meetings and visits (15%). This is followed by knowledge sharing (14%), and the least discussed topic is legal processes/legal objection processes (3%).

It is possible to see a similar situation in CSOs' relationship with the Turkish Grand National Assembly. 86 % of the CSOs that have been in contact with the Turkish Grand National Assembly so far have held a meeting with parliament members, while 29% of them participated in the commission meetings, 21% met the Turkish Grand National Assembly to give petitions and contribute to the draft laws.

It is seen that civil society is connected to local governments the most among public institutions. 80 %of the CSOs participating in the survey work directly or indirectly with local governments.

**Graph 15. Working directly or indirectly with local governments (municipalities)**



**Table 3. Cases where CSOs are in contact with local governments (municipalities)**

Acquaintance meetings/Visits	14%
Knowledge sharing	14%
Demanding	10%
Receiving information	9%
Project collaborations	9%
Local advocacy activities	8%
Expert activities	6%
Producing strategies	6%
Research	5%
Disseminating the campaigns created by the municipalities	5%
Financial support	4%
Making complaints	4%
Writing reports	4%

The of relationships they establish draw a similar picture with the case of central public institutions. CSOs mostly realize acquaintance meetings with local governments (14%) and knowledge sharing activities (14%). The rates of collaborating on projects (9%), carrying out local advocacy activities (8%) or strategy production (6%) remain low. Here, it is seen that CSOs have made a significant effort to establish relations with public institutions, but those relations remain at the level of acquaintance, and that there is still so much work to do in terms of CSOs active participation in decision-making.

### **The state implemented domination of politics in Türkiye restricts the civic space**

Representatives of civil society think that politics has always been dominated by civil society through the state. This domination also creates an obstacle to the shaping of civil society around values. It is underlined that there is such a hierarchical relationship between politics and civil society. This hierarchical relationship is thought to bring a variety of problems with it from criminalization

of civil society to destroying all autonomous space. The making of some civilian activities into materials in ideology-based accusations is an example of this situation. In recent years, the crisis experienced by the think-thanks and even the meaninglessness of these organizations is considered as the lack of meaningful politics in Türkiye. In an equation without meaningful politics, it is not possible for civil society to contribute to the policy-making processes. CSOs are of the common idea that politics considers civil society as a threat and restricts the civic space.

*“So let me say that in the end, in a society that already has a quite weak civil tradition and lacks a custom of producing common value by gathering with all its differences in the civic space, the civic space has to pay for this intensely authoritarian rule of politics, and this is how things go.” -Opinion Leader*

### **Civil society cares about maintaining distance in its relationship with politics**

There are many stakeholders who define civil society as the backyard of politics. In this context, representatives of civil society think that their distances should be maintained while establishing a relationship with politics. For example, not to receive financial resources from political parties and to be more independent of resources in this sense.

However, it is argued that civil society should be above politics. It is thought that there are civil society organizations that come together on the wall of the political groups and this is the overshadowed expertise of civil society. It is emphasized that such established relations are not in accordance with the existence of civil society, and that civil society is primarily emphasized that the relationship with politics on the border of their fields.

*"...in fact, civil society and politics cannot create a smooth and rational relationship because political priorities overshadow the priorities regarding the expertise on the topic. Civil society organizations start to build up around each political segment. So this takes civil society from its independent, autonomous position where it would serve and help its area of interest and turns it into a soldier in the internal fights of politics" -Academician*

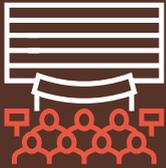
*"They know everything best. They consider this as "taking advice" from others. They do not even approach something as taking advice from someone other than themselves, they think they can know and do everything best. So, we see this attitude on TV every day, considering politics in the broadest sense, we see them supposedly including a woman in discussion programs just for the show of it, just to say it hasn't been done. Except for that, we never see one. Just five guys discussing any topic, be it abortion or be it İstanbul Convention, so that's the situation we have here." -Academician*

*"I actually think that civil society organizations should be in contact with every party in a non-partisan manner. I am a person who thinks that the relationship between civil society organizations with political parties in a partisan manner will harm civil society in the medium and long term. Because I think civil society is above all parties, and should have independent decision-making mechanisms and policy proposals." **Civil Society Representative***

## **Politicians behave as if they know everything best**

Another dynamic behind the distancing of politicians with civil society is seen as their refusal to take advice from civil society. In Türkiye, which is stated that politics consists of men who know the best of everything, politicians are criticized that they do not consult other stakeholders such as civil society experts.

# Decision Mechanisms And Administrative System of Türkiye



Representatives of civil society argue that one of the most urgent duties of the state is to create environments where all civil society organizations and people with different opinions will come together with an egalitarian and participatory administration approach.

## Türkiye needs abandon the identity-based state mentality

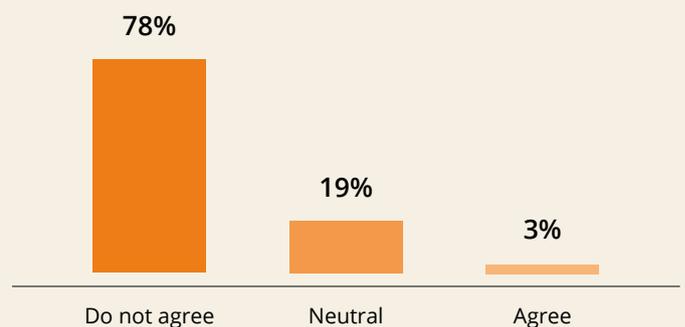
Türkiye has been governed by an identity-based state mentality since the establishment of the Republic. This understanding causes polarization in politics and civil society as well as in society. It is thought that the current administration system of Türkiye is still carried out on identities, and that the administration and thus decision mechanisms need to move from an ideological understanding to an egalitarian understanding. Representatives of civil society argue that one of the most urgent duties of the state is to create environments where all civil society organizations and people with different opinions will come together with an egalitarian and participatory administration approach.

*“When we look at the current system in Türkiye, one of the main problems is polarization. Therefore, in the environment created by this polarization, everyone is in dialogue with civil society of their kind, in their own echo rooms. In other words, unfortunately, sometimes conditions sometimes the influence of social polarization has restricted the civic space. So, everyone created their own civic space. However, I think what we call the civic space must be a vast space that has inclusivity in terms of both advocacy and policy making.”* **Civil Society Representative**

## The most negative aspect of the current administrative system is that it affects negatively the dialogue of civil society and administration

There is a common opinion that Türkiye’s current centralist administrative system negatively affects the dialogue of civil society with administration. It is underlined that the most important indicator of this is the restriction in the field of freedom of expression and freedom of association. In addition to the restriction of freedoms, the current system limits the participation of civil society in decision-making processes. It is emphasized that in the past administration system, where the Assembly is described as stronger, CSOs could participate in the laws and legislative processes more, and in the new system, the doors of the policy makers are closed to civil society. Civil society representatives suffer from the difficulty of reaching the Presidential Policy Boards.

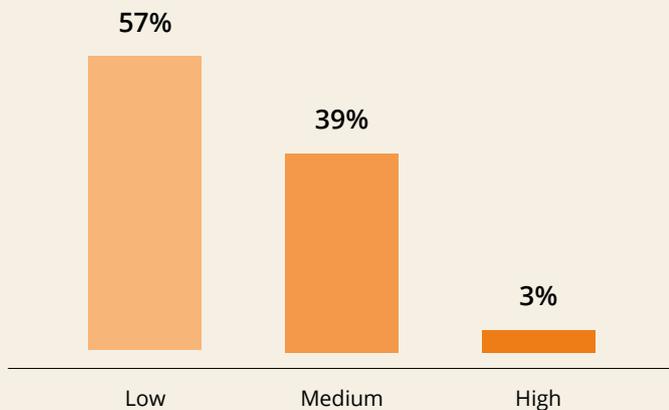
Graph 16. Rates of CSOs agreeing with the statement “The structure of the central government is suitable for civil society to participate in the central government’s decisions”



78% of the CSOs participating in the survey think that the structure of the central government is not suitable for civil society to participate in the decisions of the central government.

However, 57% of CSOs state that the capacity of civil society to influence the central government's decisions is low. At this point, it can be said that civil society criticizes itself in terms of its capacity of influence.

**Graph 17. CSOs' evaluation of civil society's capacity to participate effectively in central government's decisions**



### **Democratic institutions need to be functionalized again**

Civil society representatives and opinion leaders think that the current administration system is a structure in which the state is under the control of a single person, politics is disabled, and society is completely ignored. While changing this administrative system, it is emphasized that democratic institutions should be made functional again. It is considered essential that all institutions become different from the existing structure and that the executive mechanism is subject to supervisory boards and institutions.

### **A centralized system far from localization**

It can be said that all agree on the negative effects of Türkiye's centralized administrative system, except for the ruling parties. It is criticized that the system is a more mi-

cro, more localized system that closes that opportunity and centralizes it, while it can be strengthened in an environment where everyone can express themselves under their own conditions, with each political or other identity.

However, there are also those who think that the centralized management system has positive effects in taking decisions promptly. In this respect, it is also emphasized that the problems in the current system, when compared to the old administrative systems, are not only caused by centralization.

### **Law on political parties needs to be changed**

A holistic transformation is needed for the administrative system to become more democratic. First of all, it is suggested that the law on political parties should be changed. It is considered important for Turkish democracy that political parties have a more participatory and pluralistic administration approach, rather than that the leaders determine everything.

### **A strengthened parliamentary system alone is not the solution**

Moving from the current central government system to a system in which the parliament is stronger is a commonly accepted solution. However, the strengthened parliamentary system that is on the agenda is not seen as the solution on its own. Some experts argue that if the system is to change, it is necessary to build a system with a brand-new spirit and institutions. It is underlined that if we transition to a strengthened democratic parliamentary system, there should be a functioning and independent mechanism for the participation of civil society in decisions. In such a case, it is thought that civil society can establish a neutral relationship not only with politics but also with the state. However, especially politicians on the opposition side argue that the strengthening of the TGNA is essential for the strengthening of civil society.

*“A lot of damage has been done to Türkiye in many economic, social and political terms. For Türkiye, I think I already said it at the beginning while answering another question, that is, it is urgently necessary to rebuild those institutions. I don't think there is anything new in this system that can be injected if the strengthened parliamentary system comes. It should be marked as the end of a period and we should set out with a brand-new spirit and a new understanding of institutions, otherwise this is a somewhat broken system.”* **Civil Society Representative**

## **There is a need to re-establish balance control mechanisms and justice**

It is stated that if the management system is to be reconstructed, it needs to be in a structure that shapes the transfer of the rights of the society to other structures or other mechanisms. In this regard, it is recommended that balance control, law, transparency mechanisms and strengthening of the parliament should be considered holistically and a monitoring system should be established. It is thought that when all this happens, justice can be re-established, and thus a democratic and participatory system can be established.

## **Debates on the governmental system are also held at the political level.**

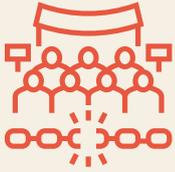
When Türkiye's current administrative system is discussed, the issue of returning to the parliamentary system among the discussed topics. There are also experts who think that there is no direct correlation between the government system and the participation of civil society in the legislative process. In other words, the presidential administration system is not the only dynamic that hinders the participation of civil society in decisions and legislative processes. Especially when the legislative processes are taken into consideration, it is seen that there is no mechanism in the current system that will directly prevent or make it difficult during the preparation and adoption of legislative proposals in the national assembly. It is thought that the discussion of the aim of strengthening the parliamentary system again at a political ground and its presentation to the public by certain parties, is causing the issue to move away from the goal of civil society or citizen participation.

# 5

## **HOW IS AN EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICS DIALOGUE POSSIBLE?**



# How is an Effective Civil Society and Politics Dialogue Possible?



**Civil society can engage in dialogue with politics by increasing the visibility of their work and creating public opinion**

The knowledge produced by civil society in Türkiye and the activities it carries out are considered successful. However, there seems to be an obstacle in the transfer of these studies to the public. Civil society can engage in a more effective dialogue with politics by increasing the visibility of its work and thus creating a public opinion. The use of independent media is important here. Although it is accepted by all stakeholders that there is a shrinkage in the mass media, social media is also thought to have an important power in creating public opinion. Politicians suggest that civil society can get more in touch with politics by creating public debates.



**Civil society can organize events where it invites politicians to present the knowledge it produces.**

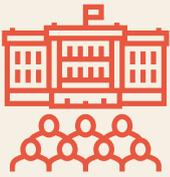
Civil society produces knowledge on many social and environmental issues, organizes events and meetings to share this knowledge. In general, the guests at such events are also made up of relevant stakeholders such as civil society or academia. CSOs can organize events and meetings to which they invite political actors, in order to put the knowledge that they produce and the reports they produce on the agenda of politics. Experts who have experienced this method and stated that it is effective, recommend that civil society try different channels in this sense.



**In civil society, especially think tanks can open channels of dialogue with politics**

It is seen that the dialogue between civil society and politics is limited and the reasons are mutual. All stakeholders have important roles for an effective dialogue and cooperation. It can be said that an effective civil society and political dialogue can be built in the field of civil society, especially with the efforts of think tanks and opinion leaders. At this point, it is suggested that think tanks and opinion leaders contribute to making the work in the field of civil society visible.

*“Although these short-cut political ways are periodically fruitful, I do not see them as very likely to produce substantial results, which cannot be put on the public agenda. For this reason, I think that in the new era, civil society should concentrate public discussions on public processes rather than intervening in political processes. In the case that it has an impact on these public processes, it is unlikely that it will not be reflected in politics. Because this is the basis and their audience, but again, I think civil society should prioritize influencing the public over influencing the political.”* **Opinion Leader**



**Civil society should highlight its expertise and establish more effective relations with the parliament in this context.**

Although the current administrative system and decision mechanisms in Türkiye become more difficult to reach by centralization, it is seen that civil society can engage more with the parliament to influence policy decisions. Here, an important criticism of civil society is that civil society does not show its expertise sufficiently when communicating with the parliament. When civil society brings its expertise to the fore, politicians in the parliament become more open to suggestions and discourses that are above all politics. It is important at this point that the law-making processes in the parliament are monitored by civil society. If civil society is going to influence any decision in the parliament, it is thought that it will open the channels of influence if it has a good command of the jargon there and offers solutions rather than problems when communicating with parliament members.



**Civil society needs to develop its capacity to lobby**

Lobbying is an activity that is avoided by many CSOs. There is a negative perception of lobbying with politics because when we look at the experiences of politicians, there is a common perception that lobbying activities are generally done for personal gain. However, lobbying is an important area to influence political decisions. In doing so, politicians care about which issue the CSOs contacted will influence a decision. It is possible to say that this will be an effective method in influencing decisions when civil society offers expertise in politics, develops solution proposals and conducts lobbying activities, especially on issues such as the economy and poverty, which stand out in the country's agenda.



**Civil society is expected to communicate with politicians in a negotiation language**

It is important that the language and style of CSOs are more negotiant and constructive in their lobbying or general politics discourse. Civil society's long-standing political discourse targeting the government has been criticized. While criticizing the decision makers or the government, there is a need for civil society to take a stance and produce political discourses in this direction. It seems that the distance of the political world from civil society can be overcome with a language that is open to dialogue and negotiation.

*“When civil society organizations take an opposing stance, not entirely through opposition, but with arguments and guiding, they can make very serious contributions to both political parties and political powers. But when a civil society organization takes a stand against political parties, political power or the state with ideological and completely opposing positions based on set ideas, it breaks from its function and turns into something else.”*  
Politics Representative



**Politics needs to make a legal regulation on the participation of civil society in decisions**

Since there is no institutional infrastructure for civil society to participate in decisions, there is a need for politics to make a legal regulation by attaching importance to this field. It is seen that the civil society, albeit limited, can participate in the law-making processes in the parliament. A legal arrangement that will make this more institutional and systematic can be made by politicians. Likewise, with an arrangement that can include participation in local governments and other decision mecha-

nisms, it is possible to ensure the effective participation of specialized CSOs in decisions.

*"It is necessary to reconsider the assembly in terms of civil society relations regarding what I have said before on the topic. In terms of civil society relations, it is necessary to think about public institutions in this regard. There should be a unit in the parliament and it should be in contact with civil society organizations. Just as there used to be patient rights and complaints units in hospitals, there should be units to deal with these issues and civil society organizations should have a policy on this issue. In other words, they should be able to say that they are going to talk about such issue in this such way. This can be a criterion for cooperation between civil society organizations working in the same field." Civil Society Representative*



**A structured and continuous relationship should be established between civil society and politics**

Both sides have roles for an effective civil society and politics relationship. It is emphasized that a structured communication should be established between political parties and CSOs at all levels. At this point, the need to ensure the independence of the civil society and to ensure that the opinions of CSOs can be freely communicated to the politicians is highlighted. It is recommended that representatives of the Central Decision Administrative Board (MKYK) in each political party keep a list that includes all CSOs, and involve the relevant CSOs in the law-making process in each legislative activity. In addition, it is essential to establish a structured mechanism that will ensure that political parties hold regular meetings with CSOs and that the demands reach from the bottom up, from the neighborhood level to the highest level of the party.



**If the autonomy of civil society is ensured, its relationship with politics and decision mechanisms can be established in a healthier way**

There is strong consensus on the need for civil society to be independent of its resources. There is a prevailing view that civil society can become more independent and objective if CSOs are financially supported by the public administration in a fair and independent manner. At the same time, it is seen that politicians can become more open to dialogue with an autonomous and independent civil society structure. Stakeholders agree on the approach that civil society will become more respectable by highlighting its expertise and keeping its resources away from politics, and thus a more effective civil society-politics relationship can be established.



**Civil society should emphasize its ability to bring different segments together**

One of the most unique features of civil society is its ability to bring different segments together. CSOs can bring many different stakeholders together for certain purposes and make the meetings sustainable. It is seen that civil society can contribute to politics with this feature. In order to develop solutions to Türkiye's problems or the state's problems, civil society should emphasize its ability to bring different segments together.



**Strengthening local decision-making mechanisms strengthens civil society as well**

There is a prediction that the strengthening of local governments will also strengthen civil society. For this, civil society must also be strong enough to show its power, and local governments must be really willing and enthusiastic about this issue. In this direction, it is seen that CSOs can find the opportunity to participate in the decision processes of local governments by using evi-

dence-based data to be active in the decision-making processes, by making needs analysis while expressing their demands, by developing a culture of cooperation and acting together if they cannot do it alone. However, not all local governments use the same decision mechanisms, but within the framework of certain principles, it is possible to say that developing region-specific models, methods and local-specific mechanisms will also be useful. It is also underlined that local governments, opposition and power should be serious and reliable, both on the basis of cooperation and on the basis of rights and freedoms.

## EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION AND MECHANISM

There are examples that stakeholders show as examples and find successful in influencing the decisions of the civil society in politics. From the headscarf issue to the Kurdish issue, from women's representation to poverty, CSOs seem to be leading the way in politics. For example, it is stated that thanks to the **aid-based activities** of social assistance CSOs, **poverty** has become more visible and thus entered the agenda of decision-making mechanisms.

Similarly, there is a consensus on the **success of women's organizations**, especially on gender equality. The fact that 306 women's organizations went to the CHP and asked for 300 of the 600 seats in the Grand National Assembly to be women, and the party administration's positive approach to this is again cited as an example of the important achievements of civil society.

Another example of success is the contributions of civil society in the early stages of the **Peace Process**. Many experts who frequently point to this period, while emphasizing the area that the government opened to civil society participation at that time, think that such exam-

ples should be taken as a model, which civil society organizations, initiatives or institutions with different views came together and negotiated.

Some of the environmental struggles of local civil society organizations are among the successful examples. It is stated that especially the civil society's **struggle against HEPP** has brought this issue to the agenda of politicians. Some politicians give an example that, thanks to this agenda, political party directory boards are starting to include people with environmental consciousness.

While **the Animal Rights Law** is passed by the parliament, the communication and cooperation of the proposing members and the chairman of the commission with civil society representatives are among the successful examples. It is stated that from the drafting stage to the final stage, many different CSOs went to the parliament and negotiated with the authorities.

**The Right to Clean Air Platform's** struggle to install filters in the chimneys of power plants in consultation with parliamentary commissions is also mentioned among the successful examples of dialogue between civil society and politics.

## WHAT SHOULD CIVIL SOCIETY DEMAND FROM POLITICS?

Civil society is one of the most important stakeholders to ensure equality, justice, and democracy in a country. Therefore, civil society can demand many things from politics for the solution of social and environmental issues, and it can also demand regulations from politicians on the independence of civil society and freedom of expression.

What should civil society demand from politics in order to operate with an effective mechanism?

- ▶ Ensuring freedom of thought and expression
- ▶ Democratization of social justice mechanisms, and the functioning of the legal justice mechanism
- ▶ Opening the way for participation mechanisms
- ▶ Arrangements and incentives for civil society's access to resources
- ▶ Ensuring fair, equal and transparent distribution of public resources to civil society
- ▶ Facilitating the diversification of public and private funds for civil society
- ▶ Legalization of listening to relevant civil society organizations in legislative processes as part of a natural mechanism somewhere in the legislative processes
- ▶ Ensuring more independent inspection of civil society work
- ▶ Prevention of Law No. 7262, which was adopted with the title of preventing the financing of terrorism, from hindering the activities of non-profit organizations.

*“The most urgent thing right now is the end of prison sentences, investigations and court processes due to opinion and speech, due to freedom of opinion and speech, due to restrictions, and the restoration of personal rights and freedoms by acting together with civil society. In my opinion, Türkiye’s most urgent problem is the delivery of fundamental rights and freedoms right now. There is no second thing, of course, women are among those basic rights and freedoms.”* **Academician, Civil Society Representative**

# 6

## CONCLUSION



# Conclusion

**Although the results of the research do not tell us things that we did not know before and that “surprise” us, they lay the groundwork for creating a road map for the future for institutions such as YADA or others that try to shape and strengthen the field of civil society.**

As YADA Foundation, while preparing this report, we wanted to understand whether the institutions trying to carry out their advocacy activities effectively, see politics as an alternative, especially at a time when the central decision is closing itself to the access of civil society. Although the results of the research do not tell us things that we did not know before and that “surprise” us, they lay the groundwork for creating a road map for the future for institutions such as YADA or others that try to shape and strengthen the field of civil society.

In the current situation, politics does not recognize civil society, and it has a prejudice against existing civil society organizations that it has turned into a tool to legitimize those who hold political power. Civil society, on the other hand, criticizes politics for failing to create a social movement and blocking political channels, describing the ideal role of politics as being a bridge between the state, civil society, the private sector and the public, and sees existing politics as distinctly distant from this role.

Within the scope of the research, we can summarize the answers of the stakeholders to the question of what to do to overcome this situation as follows:

- ▶ In civil society, especially think tanks can open channels of dialogue with politics.
- ▶ Civil society should highlight its expertise and establish more effective relations with the parliament in this direction.

- ▶ Civil society needs to develop its capacity to lobby
- ▶ Civil society is expected to communicate with politicians in a negotiation language
- ▶ Politics needs to make a legal regulation on the participation of civil society in decision-making
- ▶ A structured and continuous relationship should be established between civil society and politics.
- ▶ If the autonomy of civil society is ensured, its relationship with politics and decision mechanisms can be established in a healthier way.
- ▶ Civil society should emphasize its ability to bring different segments together

We think that these proposals will have a positive impact on the impact of civil society on decisions and opinions in the medium and long term, and therefore on democratization in Türkiye. Expanding and deepening these proposals and intensifying work in this area is an important gap. Elimination of this gap can only be possible if both politics and civil society are motivated in this direction. The source of this motivation is none other than the construction of the next period.

**YADA Foundation**





